

VZCZCXRO9506
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHMS #0434/01 1661026
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 141026Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9682
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0540
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0428

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MUSCAT 000434

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PPD, G/TIP AND INR/R/MR
LONDON FOR NEA WATCHER
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM OIIP SMIG KPAO ELAB KCRM KMDR MU

SUBJECT: SPECIAL OMAN MEDIA REACTION: BLASTING THE TRAFFICKING
IN PERSONS REPORT

REF: A. MUSCAT 425

B. MUSCAT 426

C. MUSCAT 418

¶1. SUMMARY: Omani media, public and private alike and in all outlets, highlighted the strong official response to the 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report (Refs A, B), as made public in comments on June 10 by Foreign Ministry Secretary General Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi via a text released by the official Oman News Agency (ONA; full English text in Para 7). In tones significantly harsher than the light coverage immediately following the TIP Report's release (Ref C), all outlets hewed to the line set by ONA. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. The government's strong response was front-paged in all seven Omani dailies on June 11, with headlines such as "Sultanate Rejects US Report on Human Trafficking" (private English daily "Oman Tribune"), "Shura Council Urges Washington 'Stop the Blackmail'/Sultanate Summons American Ambassador to Give Official Statement" (private Arabic daily "Al Zaman"), and "Official Statement Refuses Content of Report / Sultanate Objects to Report of the American Foreign Ministry on Human Trafficking / Badr bin Hamed: Misleading Information and Untrue Claims / Request to Revise the Report to Reflect the Real Picture" (state Arabic daily "Oman"). Coverage in all outlets was drawn directly from the ONA text, with editorials (block quotes below) following its aggrieved tone. The blanket coverage on June 11 of the Omani response follows and builds on heavy coverage June 10 of the GCC ministerial council's reaction to the TIP report.

"FALSE AMERICAN ACCUSATIONS"

¶3. Private daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000, June 11) asks "When Will the False American Accusations Stop?":

"The American administration insists on proving to the world that it does not deserve any creditability. It loses that creditability when it tries to classify people either as righteous or wrong based on its own false values. America deliberately defames peaceful countries, even those that are its friends.

The TIP report issued by the State Department has classified Oman as a trafficker for two years consecutively. False reports that insult and slander reflect their own shortsightedness and ignore Oman's legal and regulatory

developments.

All the drafters of this report need to do is walk in the streets of any Omani city and ask about religious and other freedoms. On what basis does the American State Department have the right to evaluate the behaviors of others, especially when its own behavior does not meet such standards?"

"A FUTILE EXERCISE"

¶4. "Al-Watan" sister paper "Oman Tribune" (private English daily, circulation 8,000), also editorialized, under an ominous quote from poet Matthew Arnold: "He bears the seed of ruin in himself".

"The US State Department has in the past censured some of the GCC states on a number of other issues without knowing the truth about many things. These reports too have caused consternation. The Americans and other western countries must realize that the GCC countries have distinct cultures and traditions very different from theirs, having deep roots in Islam. And they are proud of it. Any attempt to change them is a futile exercise that will be viewed with abhorrence. The western countries should mind their own business and concentrate on rooting out the evils and inequities in their society."

TV AND RADIO FALL IN LINE

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¶5. Coverage of the official TIP reaction dominated television and radio news on June 10, with Arabic and English broadcasts leading with a verbatim reading of the ONA statement. In the case of Oman TV's English broadcast, the translation had clearly been rushed to the studio and loaded in the teleprompter without review, as it was extremely poorly translated even by local standards (to the visible discomfiture of the news reader). Coverage continued through the morning of June 11.

ONLINE: "BLACKMAIL" AND "LIES"

¶6. Online reaction has been predictably negative, with discussions on all popular Arabic fora attracting many readers and numerous posters. Typical reactions include demands for the expulsion of the Ambassador and criticism of perceived American unfairness to Oman, saying reports such as TIP are "blackmail" from "retail shops sold to the highest bidder." Posters denounced U.S. "lies" and praised the Omani response as "an honorable action", adding "our government has the right to protest." "It's time to say No to America!" concluded one poster.

THE OFFICIAL TEXT

¶7. Following is the full English text of the Oman News Agency release used as the basis for local coverage:

"Sultanate Rejects U.S. State Department Report on Human Trafficking"

"Muscat, June 10th (ONA) - The Sultanate has rejected and protested the latest US State Department's report on Human Trafficking citing the Sultanate for the second year among countries that have made no efforts to fight this global issue. It said that the faulted report doesn't tell the truth, does badly with the Sultanate, and shows the short sightedness

of the other party. Besides, it doesn't reflect the real situation lived by the Omani citizens and expatriates in the Sultanate.

The above had been quoted by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry, in reply to journalists' questions today regarding the Sultanate's stand on the above noted US State Department's report and measures taken by the Sultanate in this regard.

He said that he has met with the US ambassador to the Sultanate yesterday and handed over to him an official protest note, informing the Sultanate's rejection of the misleading information and incorrect allegations mentioned in the report which contradict the good living reality enjoyed by people in the Sultanate, thanks be to God.

He added that everyone knows that the Sultanate is renowned for its serious co-operation with the international community to combating crime and that the competent authorities in the Sultanate are very serious on cracking down, arresting, and punishing perpetrators of all crimes and not only human trafficking which have become a global issue. He cited the human trafficking cases as limited and individual as compared to many other countries. The Sultanate with its different institutions, is providing the crime victims with relevant care, sympathizing the human dimension of the problem, sympathizes with victims in accordance with tradition, culture and morals of the Omani society which rejects defame and violating human dignity, he stressed.

During his statement, the Foreign Ministry Secretary General, said that crime ratio in the Sultanate as it is internationally known, is considerably low due to the enforced policies, laws and procedures and due to the Omani people respect of their religion, traditions and solid values. Therefore, the Sultanate doesn't find any justification for such faulted and unjust report.

Considering the Sultanate's good historical relations with the United States of America, it hopes that officials at the US State Department may revise the report to reflect the true image, secured and stabilized situation in the Sultanate to

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correct the Sultanate's related information and highlight its distinguished record in this regard to maintain such relations and avoid damaging them by such report, the Foreign Ministry's Secretary General affirmed. The Sultanate has long, initiated procedures of issuing legislations on human trafficking, he added."

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